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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/E MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3356
RHMFISS/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 3077
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 3288
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BEIRUT 001521

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO
P FOR DRUSSELL, RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR KHALIZAD/WOLFF/SCHEDLEBAUER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/YERGER/MCDERMOTT/RAMCHAND
OSD FOR EDELMAN/LONG/STRAUB/DALTON
JOINT STAFF FOR RANK/NICHOLSON
CENTCOM FOR ALLARDICE/MACLEAN/PADDOCK
DIA FOR LARSON/CRONIN/KRAUSE

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: MINISTER OF INTERIOR PRESENTS ELECTION
PLAN AND DONORS RESPOND

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

Summary

1. (C) Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud presented a master plan for execution of the 2009 parliamentary elections on October 20 during a well-attended briefing for international donors. Though still light on specifics and cost estimates, this document was welcomed by the donor community who have been poised for months to assist. UNDP Country Director Marta Ruedas, who will be leading international coordination efforts, organized a follow-on meeting on October 23 for donors. The U.S. and EU announced significant contributions and a number of other countries stated that they will use the master plan as the basis for proposals to their capitals for funding. On the basis of this initial donor meeting, it appears that the entire "wish list" from the Ministry will not be met by donor. EU representatives, in particular, asked what contributions the GOL itself would be making towards the administration of this important election. End Summary.

Master Plan Unveiled at Long Last

2. (C) After numerous delays, the Ministry of Interior presented a master plan to the donor community which is a "list of activities, tasks and outputs required to prepare, implement and evaluate in the most adequate manner for the 2009 parliamentary elections." The Ministry said it prepared the documents using lessons learned from previous elections, reports and recommendations prepared by domestic and international organizations, and the requirements of the new electoral law passed on September 29. The master plan also states the Ministry's intention to improve the integrity of the electoral process, increase voter participation, ensure that there is transparency and accountability throughout the process and, interestingly, "to make the best out of the voted reforms." Baroud told the donor community frankly that he had wished for more reforms to be adopted by parliament, but that he intended to be as forward-leaning on the approved reforms as possible. He used pre-printed ballots as an example. While civil society activists were dismayed to see

this measure defeated in parliament, Baroud told donors that he is speaking with political parties to look for compromises and partial, non-mandatory measures as an alternative.

¶3. (C) The master plan is broken down into nine specific components:

- Voter registration
- Polling stations
- Supervisory Commission for Electoral Campaigns (SCEC)
- Capacity Building
- Information, Communication, and Outreach
- Security and Control Room
- Observation and Coordination
- Evaluation of Electoral Process
- Implementation of Out of Country Voting (Note: The new law requires that this measure be in place for the 2013 elections, not the 2009 elections. End Note)

Baroud Wants Donor Coordination, But Done by Others

¶4. (C) Baroud stressed the need for donors to avoid duplicative efforts. "There are a lot of international funds spent in Lebanon, but they often overlap on one issue while leaving others unaddressed." He also stressed the need to increase transparency for the Lebanese electorate on international contributions. "We must be able to replace rumor with fact."

¶5. (C) Oddly, Baroud then said he was willing to leave the

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room so that donor coordination could take place privately. This was met with a few raised eyebrows, as a number of other donors had hoped the Minister himself would take on this responsibility. However, Baroud and Ruedas have been in close contact during the development of the master plan and she quickly stepped forward with an offer to coordinate a follow-on donors meeting.

¶6. (C) Baroud then responded to questions from the donors. When asked why no costs had been included, he said they were still finalizing those figures with the help of a report prepared by the EU. He also said that he hoped donors would consider in-kind contributions of polling station equipment, uniforms for polling center staff, and other equipment. "Given the complex Lebanese procurement system, we would prefer to accept in-kind donations." The Ambassador asked Baroud about international election observers. He said that the Council of Ministers must first appoint members of the Supervisory Committee for Electoral Campaigns and he did not believe that a firm decision on observers would be taken until early 2009.

¶7. (C) Baroud said he and his team were ready to respond to any follow-up questions from donors. Baroud has an extremely small, overworked staff working on this issue. Ruedas informed us privately that UNDP had agreed to pay for 4-5 additional elections experts to be hired and seconded to the Ministry as soon as possible, which will help enormously.

U.S. and EU Pledge Substantial Amounts, Others are Considering, But Overall Total Will Fall Short

¶8. (C) UNDP quickly organized a meeting for donors on October 23 and Rabiha Shaer also attended as a representative of Minister Baroud. While no specific amount has been provided, UNDP officials estimate that the master plan activities will cost approximately \$15 million total. The EU, which had met with member state representatives the day before, began by announcing a three million euro contribution, which will focus on voter registration, polling stations, information and communications issues, and the SCEC, which was listed as the highest priority for the EU. Patrick Laurant, the head

of the EU Mission in Lebanon, also told fellow donors that material or in-kind contributions were being considered and that the EU would offer consultants to the Ministry for procurement, logistics, and media planning.

¶9. (C) The Ambassador shared with the larger group elements of the USG assistance package, which includes a USD 1.5 million grant DRL grant to the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) from February 2008 and a more recent USAID award of USD 6.1 million to IFES, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the International Republican Institute (IRI) for additional electoral support activities. IFES will provide the most direct support to the Ministry and will address a number of needs outlined by the master plan.

¶10. (C) The Danish Ambassador said he needed to consult with his capital, but that there was the possibility of a donation "up to one million dollars." He also said they were interested in providing in-kind contributions, as a well-known Danish company had produced secure ballot boxes for a number of recent international elections. The Mexican Ambassador, who has been very active locally on this issue, said that his country would not be able to make an outright financial contribution, but would offer technical expertise, with a specific focus on the long-term planning needed for out-of-country voting. The UK announced a small contribution to IFES to examine security issues in the contested electoral districts and also announced a small grant to the Lebanese Transparency Association (LTA) to focus on campaign finance monitoring, a new regulation introduced by the recent election law. The Norwegians, Germans, Swiss, Italians, and Romanians all asked for more detailed project proposals from the Ministry in order to request funds from their capitals.

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The Canadians announced that they were considering financial support to UNDP to assist with the coordination efforts.

¶11. (C) While the exact figures are not available, it became clear that donor contributions would not cover the entire cost of administering the election. Laurant bluntly asked what donors could expect the GOL itself to contribute to this effort. Shaer responded that the Minister had presented the master plan to the Council of Ministers, but he does not have the authority to demand that the Council fully fund the master plan. "He can't make it happen on his own - there must be enough political support for an allotment from the national budget."

¶12. (C) When asked how he would prioritize spending if all elements could not be funded, Shaer said that voter registration and the issuance of proper ID cards were the most urgent and important measures needed to restore the confidence of the Lebanese electorate. "In the last election, more than 330,000 voter registration applications were rejected with very little accountability." Shaer said that Baroud had appointed an Internal Security Forces (ISF) general to run twelve registration centers throughout the country, but they needed software and machines to produce the ID's as soon as possible.

Comment

¶13. (C) While security was a component of the master plan, few donors seem to address this issue. Given that the elections are scheduled to take place on a single day for the first time, there is a need for the Lebanese security services to coordinate and plan for this massive task. The Ambassador suggested that interested donors form a specialized sub-group to discuss the election security issue in greater detail. End Comment.
SISON